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SUBJECT: PAKISTAN MEDIA REACTION: FEBRUARY 24, 2009

Summary: TNSM (Tehrik Nifaz-i-Shariat Muhammadi) chief Sufi Mohammad's statement appealing to the "government and Taliban to release each other's prisoners and dismantle check-posts" in Swat valley dominated headlines in several major newspapers on Tuesday. All newspapers highlighted reports that "Prime Minister Gilani and Punjab Chief Minister Sharif agreed to resolve issues amicably." Some major dailies underlined the Pakistani military spokesman's remarks that the "government failed to stop non-state actors." Several newspapers re-published a NYT story claiming that "over 70 U.S. military advisers are working in Pakistan."

Most major dailies ran editorials on a variety of subjects including Foreign Minister Qureshi and Army Chief Kiyani's visit to the U.S., peace accord in Swat, NWFP government's decision to distribute arms among local people, the drone attacks and so forth. The second-largest Urdu daily, "Nawa-i-Waqt," advised that the "Foreign Minister, and Army Chief should not accept any U.S. directive against the peace deal." In its editorial, the English daily, "The News," noted that "there is no easy way out of the mess we have got ourselves into. The militants must be defeated." The prestigious English daily, "Dawn," observed that the Tehrik Taliban of Pakistan (TTP) is "looking to carve out a place for itself in the future set-up from which it can ensure its relevance and safety." End Summary.

News Stories

"TNSM Chief Asks Government, Taliban To Free Prisoners" "Dawn" (02/24)

"Tehrik Nifaz-i-Shariat Muhammadi Chief Maulana Sufi Mohammad appealed to the government and Taliban on Monday to release each other's prisoners and dismantle check-posts for restoration of durable peace in Swat."

"Sufi Gives Plan To Draw People Out - Asks Militants To Stop their Activities; Invites CM To Visit Swat" "The News" (02/24)

"Tanzeem Nifaz Shariat-e-Muhammadi (TNSM) Chief Maulana Sufi Muhammad, while expressing concern over the activities of the militants in Swat after the peace agreement, asked them on Monday to stop their militant actions. Unveiling a nine-point plan for restoration of peace in Swat at a press conference, he asked both the militants and the government to fulfill their responsibility by taking measures for bringing back calm to the valley."

"Gilani, Shahbaz Agree To Resolve Issues Amicably" "Daily Times" (02/24)

"Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani and Punjab Chief Minister Shahbaz Sharif agreed to work together for the supremacy of parliament, national reconciliation and the promotion of democratic traditions in a meeting at the Prime Minister's House on Monday."

"World Community Faces Threats From Non-State Actors" "Daily Times" (02/24)

"The world is facing a serious threat from non-state actors who are bent upon damaging global peace, President Asif Ali Zardari said on Monday. Addressing Shanghai-based think tanks, the president said the emergence of such elements was a new phenomenon, and that they have 'nothing to lose and everything to damage.'"

"Government Fails To Stop Non-State Actors" "The Nation" (02/24)

"Pakistan Army Monday confirmed that it had halted its month-long operations against militants in Swat. Addressing a seminar organized by Sustainable Policy Development Institute (SDPI) in Islamabad, Major-General Athar Abbas said that the government couldn't control the non-state actors, as the militants continued getting funds from the inimical forces."

"Troops To Stay In Swat: Sherry" "The Nation" (02/24)

"Federal Minister for Information Sherry Rehman in Islamabad on Monday made it clear that Pakistan was not facing any external pressure over Swat deal. While talking to media persons, Sherry said there was no proposal under consideration to pull out troops from restive valley and the Army will stay in Swat. She said the government would stand by the commitments made in Swat deal."

"All Schools Reopen In Restive Swat Valley" "The News" (02/24)

"Smiling students were seen going to their schools despite a torrential rain as all the educational institutions, including girls schools re-opened on Monday after the initiation of peace process in the valley."

"Over 70 U.S. Military Advisers Work In Pakistan: Report" "The News" (02/24)

"More than 70 United States military advisers and technical specialists are secretly working in Pakistan to help its armed forces battle Al Qaeda and the Taliban in the tribal areas, The New York Times quoted American military officials as saying late Sunday night."

"Pentagon Says U.S. Military Role In Pakistan No Secret" "Dawn" (02/24)

"The U.S. Defense Department on Monday confirmed it has a team of military advisers training the Pakistani army in counter-insurgency operations but said the program has been openly discussed for months, rejecting a New York Times report suggesting it was a 'secret' project, Pentagon spokesman Bryan Whitman said."

"Pakistan Wants NATO To Seal Off Afghan Border Along Bajaur" "Daily Times" (02/24)

"The U.S. and NATO should seal off Afghanistan's border with Pakistan along Bajaur to clear the region of what remains of Al Qaeda and the Taliban, a top Pakistani general recommended on Monday. 'Our recommendation to them [the coalition forces and Afghanistan] is that while we are doing maneuvers, please seal off the border,' Frontier Corps (FC) Inspector General Maj Gen Tariq Khan told Daily Times in interview."

"FC Chief Says Bajaur To Be Cleared By Mid-March" "Dawn" (02/24)

"Frontier Corps Inspector-General Maj-Gen. Tariq Khan, in charge of the campaign against Taliban in Bajaur, said on Monday that his forces expected to have the tribal agency in control by mid-March."

"Bajaur Taliban Cease Fire, Enter Secret Deal" "The News" (02/24)

"After months of fierce fighting between militants and security forces, the Taliban militants on Monday announced a unilateral ceasefire and secretly signed a peace accord with the government, pledging to remain peaceful. Following the signing of the accord, Maulvi Faqir Mohammad, Taliban commander in Bajaur and deputy leader of the Baitullah Mahsud-led Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), announced unilateral ceasefire through his widely listened FM radio on Monday evening."

"USAID Launches Training Program For Teachers" "The Nation," "Dawn" (02/24)

"United States Agency for International Development (USAID) Mission Director, Ms. Anne Aarnes congratulated the Ministry of Education for the launch of Pakistan's National Professional Standards for Teachers program. The launching ceremony followed by a workshop was jointly organized by the Ministry of Education and UNESCO under the Strengthening Teacher Education in Pakistan (STEP) project funded by USAID."

"U.S. Working On Economic Package For Pakistan" "Dawn" (02/24)

"The United States is working on a major economic package for Pakistan and Afghanistan, besides involving the two countries in formulating a new security strategy for the region. Diplomatic sources told 'Dawn' that Richard Holbrooke, the U.S. special envoy for Afghanistan and Pakistan, had recently invited about a dozen economists from the two countries for discussing various proposals for the economic uplift of the region."

"U.S. To Weigh Pak, Afghan Views In Devising Strategy" "The Nation" (02/24)

"As Pakistani and Afghan delegations began arriving for meetings with U.S. officials on the Obama Administration's review of policy towards the region the State Department on Monday said that their views are 'very important' and 'will be taken into account' while devising an effective way forward, State Department spokesman Robert Wood said."

"Extra U.S. Troops To Secure Border With Pakistan: ISAF" "The Nation" (02/24)

"Around 17,000 extra U.S. troops earmarked for Afghanistan will deploy as fast as possible and thousands more are requested for August elections, the deputy NATO force commander said on Monday. They will secure the border with Pakistan and 'thicken up the force ratios in those areas where the insurgency is still at its most virulent,' he said."

"Solecki Still Alive: Rehman Malik" "The News" (02/24)

"Adviser to the Prime Minister on Interior Rehman Malik has said kidnapped United Nations official John Solecki is alive, rejecting reports about his murder. Talking to a television channel, he said the government is trying for the safe return of John Solecki."

"Mumbai Terror Attack - Pakistan Calls For Statement Given By Eye-Witness" "Dawn" (02/24)

"Pakistan has asked India to provide the eye-witness account of police constable Arun Jadhav, who was the lone survivor of the attack on the car carrying Anti-Terror Squad Chief Hemant Karkare on the first day of Mumbai attack, saying its investigators probing the terror strike needed to examine it."

"India's Attitude Unhelpful: FO" "The Nation" (02/24)

"Pakistan on Monday termed as 'unhelpful' the Indian Foreign Minister Pranab Mukherjee's remarks that Islamabad is still in 'denial mode' over cross-border terrorism and said it was committed to bringing the perpetrators of Mumbai attacks to justice, Foreign Office Spokesman Abdul Basit said."

Editorials/Op-eds

"Foreign Minister And Army Chief's Visit To The U.S," an editorial in the second-largest, center-right nationalist Urdu daily "Nawa-i-Waqt" (cir. 125,000) (02/24)

"America's demand from the Foreign Minister and Army Chief would be that they do not allow the implementation of Swat deal, and to continue the military operation. Already U.S. officials have made statements expressing concern over the deal. The U.S. Ambassador has also traveled to her country to mount pressure on the Army Chief and the Foreign Minister.... In this scenario, the Foreign Minister and Army Chief should not accept any U.S. directive against the peace deal."

"Need For Persuasion," an editorial in the center-right national English daily "The Nation" (cir. 20,000) (02/24)

"Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi and COAS Gen. Ashfaq Parvez Kayani left for Washington on Monday to hold talks with key civil and military figures in the Obama Administration involved in a review of its Afpak policy. The visit is taking place at a time when there is misunderstanding in the U.S. regarding Pakistan's move to broker peace in Swat.... One hopes Mr. Qureshi and General Kayani would succeed in allaying U.S. suspicions.... Mr. Holbrooke' doubts about the commitment of the military and the ISI have to be removed and the U.S. persuaded to call off drone strikes. Once the Swat experiment succeeds, the United States should be advised to employ it as a template in Afghanistan."

"Call To Arms," an editorial in the centrist national English daily "The News" (cir. 55,000) (02/24)

"The Chief Minister of the Frontier province has given orders to distribute 30,000 assault rifles among villagers across the province.... This hardly seems to be a reliable basis on which to dole out large numbers of arms. It is also unclear how effective the plan to raise an elite police force of some 2,500 will be.... It is not clear how this fits in with the overall strategy for peace.... Authorities need to wake up to a simple fact: there is no easy way out of the mess we have got ourselves into. The militants must be defeated. They must be tried and made subject to justice. Otherwise, any kind of peace will not hold for long."

"Militants In Swat," an editorial in the Karachi-based center-left independent national English daily "Dawn" (cir. 55,000) (02/24)

"From the TTP's point of view there is an additional problem: ensuring their personal safety once normality returns to Swat.... The militants have made many enemies among the locals; remaining there in peace time will almost certainly invite revenge attacks. So if this is really the endgame of militancy in Swat, the TTP is looking to carve out a place for itself in the future set-up from which it can ensure its relevance and safety. Hence the mixed signals of talking peace while reminding everyone of their capacity for violence."

"Threat To Swat Peace," an editorial in the Lahore-based liberal English daily "The Post" (cir. 5,000) (02/24)

"The main purpose of signing the Swat peace deal is the same of engaging the Taliban in talks to bring permanent peace in the region. For this purpose the temporary 10-day truce should be made permanent by observing the deal completely. The responsibility of making this agreement permanent lies on both parties."

"Broken Pens," an editorial in the centrist national English daily "The News" (cir. 55,000) (02/24)

"It is said that the pen is mightier than the sword, and so that may be - but in the topsy-turvy world of Pakistan the sword is beginning to prevail over the pen.... Television reporters have been threatened, the houses of journalists and commentators demolished and their families intimidated. There is a determined effort to silence the messenger across the whole of the conflict zone that covers most of NWFP and all of the Tribal Agencies."

"Need To End Mistrust Between The Taliban And Government," an editorial in the Lahore-based independent Urdu daily "Din" (circ. 5000) (02/24)

"Allowing girls schools to reopen can be viewed as a little flexibility on the Taliban's part but kidnapping administrative officials to get comrades released cannot be condoned at all."

"NWFP's Risky Decision Of Distribution Of Weapons," an editorial note in the Karachi-based, pro Taliban Jihadi Urdu daily "Islam" (cir. 15,000) (02/24)

"At a time when the peace process is in progress in the NWFP, and the local Taliban are ready to surrender as a result of the government's pronouncement of implementation of the 'Nizam-i-Adal' in Swat valley, it is incomprehensible that the NWFP administration has decided to distribute weapons to local groups against militants. In fact, this decision will send a wrong message to local Taliban and extremists that the government is planning to raise new armed groups or militias against them. This is the time to disarm the NWFP rather than providing more weapons to people."

"Policy Of Distribution Of Books Instead Of Arms Must Be Assumed," an editorial in the Peshawar-based Urdu-language daily "Mashriq" (cir. 55,000) (02/24)

"NWFP Chief Minister Hoti has perhaps decided to distribute arms among the local villagers for their self-defense against the terrorists. But keeping in mind the adverse effects of the 'Klashnikov culture' on Pakistani society during the Russian invasion in Afghanistan, any such move will be tantamount to set off civil war or uprising in the country. It is the responsibility of the government to protect the lives and properties of common man. NWFP Chief Minister must launch a drive to distribute books, and spread education in the province to create enduring peace in this part of the world."

"Distribution Of Weapons Among NWFP's Peaceful, Organized Groups," an editorial in liberal Urdu daily "Express" (cir. 100,000) (02/24)
"This step by the government would help reduce insecurity among the people and they would be better equipped to stop extremists. The assurance the government is seeking in exchange is also encouraging as it would help prevent the unlawful use of these rifles. If this experiment succeeds, its scope could be extended."

"Decision To Give 30,000 Guns To NWFP Citizens," an editorial in the center-right Urdu daily "Pakistan" (cir. 10,000) (02/24)

"Arming the civilians can be termed a positive step. It is expected that this measure in the NWFP would help counter militancy to some extent.... Formation of an elite commando force is also a positive development. However, in order to get the desired results from these measures, the distribution of rifles and induction into the elite force must be done in a transparent manner."

"PPP, MQM And JUI Must Clear Their Position On Drone Attacks," an editorial in the popular rightist Urdu-language daily "Ausaf" (cir. 10,000) (02/24)

"There are some media reports that PPP, MQM, JUI and PML-Q have been covertly aiding the U.S. in its predator drone strikes in Pakistan's tribal areas. If this is true, then this disclosure will definitely damage the credibility of these parties. It is essential for these parties to clear their position on this much-debated issue. If they don't contradict these reports, people of Pakistan will be forced to think that the verbal protests of these mainstream political parties are just eyewash and to deceive their electorates."

"Drone Attacks And The Role Of Political Parties," an editorial in the second-largest, center-right nationalist Urdu daily "Nawa-i-Waqt" (cir. 125,000) (02/24)

"A senior officer of the U.S. Defense Department has revealed that the drone strikes were initiated after taking the MQM, PPP, JUI-F and PML-Q into confidence....It is impossible that the PPP, MQM and JUI would have secretly supported the drone attacks. It is extremely unfortunate if this is so. If the U.S. officials' claim is wrong, these political parties should protest strongly as the report has damaged their credibility."

"The Spy Factory," an op-ed by Anjum Niaz in the centrist national

English daily "The News" (cir. 55,000) (02/24)

"Has the Pakistan Army then capitulated to the U.S. who appears playing a double game? It calls Pakistan an 'ally' and respects our sovereignty, yet Obama's spy factory run by the CIA inside Pakistan brusquely pushes our leaders aside; the CIA wiretaps our government and the terrorists on the excuse that the militants must be killed before they topple Zardari? 'The U.S. has played a double game by allowing Pakistan to be in bed with the Taliban and Washington simultaneously,' says Rex. 'It suited them at the time.'"

"Containment, Not Capitulation," an op-ed by Dushka H. Saiyid in the Karachi-based center-left independent national English daily "Dawn" (cir. 55,000) (02/24)

"With NATO refusing to provide more combat troops for the war in Afghanistan, and the international community leaving Afghanistan billions of dollars short of funds promised for development, the surge of 17,000 American troops might only help as a holding operation, but is not likely to change the balance of power on the ground.... All efforts must be made to negotiate with the Taliban for there is the grave danger that Afghanistan could become a quagmire like Vietnam..... However, American policy towards the Taliban continues to be marked by confusion and clumsiness."
GFeierstein